

VA Caregiver Program

VFW's Concerns:

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) provides benefits of medical care, respite care and sometimes money payments for caregivers of severely disabled Post-9/11 veterans, but not to caregivers of veterans of previous eras. The VFW believes severely wounded and ill veterans of all conflicts have made incredible sacrifices, and all family members who care for them are deserving of equal recognition and support. Family caregivers who choose to provide in-home care to veterans who were severely disabled in the line of duty choose to put their lives and careers on hold, often accepting great emotional and financial burdens. The lack of these benefits impacts a caregiver's ability to provide in-home care and often results in veterans receiving more costly long-term care in an institutional setting.

In 2014, VA reported to Congress that it could provide caregiver training and benefits for all eras of veterans, but funding would need to be increased. Congress has introduced legislation to expand caregiver assistance to all generations, but it fails to pass because of the lack of funding. Since taking office in 2017, Secretary of Veterans Affairs Dr. David Shulkin has testified on his commitment to expanding this program even if he must lead that expansion under the current VA budget. This would strain a budget the VFW believes should be larger for many programs and services, including expanded caregiver benefits.

VFW's Solutions:

- Congress must pass S.591 or H.R.1472, the *Military and Veterans Caregivers Services Improvement Act of 2017*, which would recognize that pre-9/11 veterans also need caregiver benefits which keep them out of costly inpatient nursing facilities, and to relieve the burden on caring family members who have suffered long enough.